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THE DOCTRINE

OF

EQUALITY

OF

RANK AND CONDITION

EXAMINED AND SUPPORTED

ON

THE AUTHORITY OF

THE NEW TESTAMENT,

AND ON THE

PRINCIPLES OF REASON AND BENEVOLENCE.

By JAMES PILKINGTON. R

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THE
DOCTRINE OF EQUALITY

OF
RANK AND CONDITION, &c.

IN every age of the world power and wealth have been leading objects of human pursuit; and the wise and good have constantly endeavoured to counteract their influence on the minds of men. That Jesus Christ in particular earnestly engaged in so benevolent an undertaking cannot be doubted by those, who have perused with careful and impartial attention the sacred writings, which give an account of his discourses and behaviour. In this respect he certainly proceeded further than any other founder of a religious institution has done. By examining the scriptures of the new testament we shall see, that one great

aim of his preaching and example was to bring mankind as nearly as possible to an equality of rank and condition.

Before the birth of our lord his appearance had been a long time expected by the Jewish nation. But they had formed so exalted ideas of the power, with which he would be invested, and the grandeur, with which he would be accompanied, that when he really came amongst them, many would not believe, that he was the person, who was alluded to by their prophets. Even those, who did receive him in the character of the Messiah expected, that notwithstanding the meaness of his birth and education he would rise to the possession of great dominion. This hope seems to have had considerable influence on the minds of his chosen disciples. He therefore embraced every suitable opportunity of correcting the error, into which they had fallen. When they came unto him, enquiring who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, he called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst and said, verily I say unto you except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble him-

himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In this and other parts of the new testament the kingdom of heaven signifies the dispensation of the gospel. Our saviour therefore means, that whoever exercises a humble disposition has the most just claim to the character of a christian. It is equally manifest, that whoever desires to obtain a larger share of power and wealth, than is possessed by his fellow men forfeits all title to such an appellation.

The same doctrine is more clearly expressed on another similar occasion. Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her two sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him; and he said unto her, what wilt thou? she saith unto him, grant, that these my two sons may sit the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, ye know not, what ye ask, are ye able to drink of the cup, that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say, we are able. And he saith unto them, ye shall indeed drink of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism, that I am baptized with, but to sit on my right hand
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and on my left is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them, for whom it is prepared of my father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren. But he called them unto him, and said, ye know, that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister, and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the son of man came not to be ministered to, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many. After our lord had given a full and explicit answer to the question proposed by the wife of Zebedee, he embraced the opportunity, which then offered, of informing them in what light he wished his followers to regard each other. I think, that he clearly inculcates such a degree of benevolence and humility, as must entirely prevent a difference of rank and condition from ever taking place amongst men. If it was the duty of all to become servants to each other, how could they comply with this exhortation, whilst there existed any distinction amongst them. If none was allowed to claim or exercise a superiority

periority over the rest, it is plain, that they must be equal. That they might not possibly mistake his meaning, he directs their attention to his own conduct. He observes, that he had never required any homage or service from them, but on the contrary that he had been employed in promoting their good, and should at last lose his life in consequence of his benevolent exertions for the welfare of mankind. In delivering his instructions to his disciples on this occasion the language of Christ is neither figurative or doubtful; and I do not see, why we should not understand his advice in the first and most obvious sense, which offers.

That it was the intention of our lord to lessen, if not entirely abolish all difference of rank and condition amongst men is also manifest from various other exhortations, which are designed in a very strong and particular manner to discourage the indulgence of pride, sensuality, and covetousness. He wished to guard the multitude as well as his chosen disciples against imitating the example of the Scribes and Pharisees, who made broad their phylacteries, and enlarged the borders of their garments, and loved the uppermost rooms at feasts and chief seats in the synagogues and greet-

greetings in the markets, and to be called of men Rabbi, Rabbi. He says, but ye not called Rabbi ; for one is your master even Christ, and all ye are brethren : And call no man father upon the earth, for one is your father, who is in heaven ; neither be ye called masters, for one is your master even Christ ; but he that is greatest among you, shall be your servant ; and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he, that shall humble himself, shall be exalted. Our lord here describes the various ways, in which the pride and stateliness of the Scribes and Pharisees were displayed, and wishes to guard them against an imitation of their example. He more especially warns them against a fondness for titles. He strongly disapproves such honorary and invidious marks of distinction, because they are, he observes, inconsistent with that equality, which belonged to them as brethren, and the children of that great common parent, who is no respecter of persons. He concludes his exhortation on this subject with a solemn assurance, that whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased, and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted. He clearly and positively declares, that tho' men should treat with contempt and endeavour to destroy
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that equality, which he recommended, God was determined to support and establish it. If we believe, that he spoke with divine authority, we cannot doubt, but that those, who are ambitious of possessing high rank and great wealth, will either in this or another world be brought down below the poor and humble man.

The passage, which I have now examined, relates to a difference of rank rather than of condition. But there are several discourses in the new testament, from which it appears, that Jesus Christ intended, that the worldly circumstances of mankind should be nearly, if not entirely equal. He often pressed upon his followers the importance of paying a kind attention to the wants of the poor. When he was eating bread at the house of one of the chief Pharisees, he said unto him, when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen nor thy rich neighbours, lest they also bid thee again and a recompence be made thee, but when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. Perhaps it will be thought, that we should not put a literal construction upon these words; that all

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which they require, is, that we should take more pleasure in supplying the wants and alleviating the distresses of the poor and afflicted, than in providing for the luxurious entertainment of our friends and relations, who do not stand in need of our succour and assistance. But admitting this interpretation, the advice of our saviour, if strictly followed, would produce a state nearer to equality than that which at present prevails amongst men.

As covetousness is the principal cause of a neglect of the poor and distressed, and therefore of inequality of circumstances amongst men, our saviour in a very particular manner admonishes his disciples against the commission of this sin. Observing how much mankind were addicted to it, and how great danger there was, that his followers would fall into the general practice of the world, he says, take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth: and he spake a parable unto them, saying, the ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room, where to bestow my fruits, and he said, this will I do,

I will pull down my barns, and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods, and I will say to my soul, soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee, then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is every one, that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. A love of ease and a desire of sensual pleasures are here represented as the general motives to the accumulation of great wealth. But there is a more fordid and absurd kind of avarice than this, which has for its object the hoarding up riches without any intention of enjoying them, and is therefore more deserving of reprobation. However we see from this parable, that an indolent and luxurious life is by no means innocent. The folly of pursuing riches for the attainment of such an end is described here by our saviour in a very striking manner, and if the object, which he had in view could be obtained, one great obstruction to the practice of the doctrine under examination would be entirely removed. If a desire of acquiring wealth for the purpose of living in ease and luxury ceased to operate on the minds of men,

the fruits of their industry and care would be employed for the good of others, and the general circumstances of the world would be rendered more equal and comfortable.

I will now direct your attention to a passage which speaks still more strongly in favour of the doctrine, which we are examining. When Jesus was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled before him, and asked him, good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? And Jesus said unto him, why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments: Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, defraud not, honour thy father and mother, and he answered, and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him and said unto him, one thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and take up the cross and follow me; and he was sad at that saying and went away grieved, for he had great possessions. Could any words give a more powerful impression of the sinfulness of riches?

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They clearly shew, that the possession of great wealth is utterly incompatible with cherishing upon good ground the hope of obtaining eternal life. Our saviour absolutely insists upon the sale of all his worldly substance as a condition of granting such a privilege. Though he loved him for several good dispositions, by which he was distinguished, yet he would not alter the terms of salvation. We cannot reasonably suppose, that Jesus Christ meant, that this candidate for everlasting happiness should apply to the use of the poor all the money arising from the sale of his estate. But it would be absurd to imagine, that when he required him to dispose of the whole, he did not expect him to devote a large proportion of it to such a purpose. It appears plain to me, that our saviour on this occasion designed to inculcate the doctrine of equality of condition. Unless we are determined to pervert his language, we must allow, that he considered it as a sin to be rich. But if we admit this, it follows, that it must be wrong to possess a larger share of worldly substance, than others enjoy. For I do not know, how we can more accurately define a rich man, than a person, who has a greater portion of the outward

ward blessings of life, than usually falls to the lot of any individual.

Besides, the following part of the discourse of Christ with his disciples plainly shews, that the possession of large worldly substance is inconsistent with the hopes of a christian. When the rich man refused to comply with the terms proposed by our lord, he made this reflection, how hardly shall they, that have riches, enter into the kingdom of God. Perceiving, that his disciples were astonished at his words, he proceeded to explain the cause of the difficulty. He answered again, and said unto them, how hard is it for them, that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God. He told them, that rich men place such a degree of confidence in their great wealth as is inconsistent with that religious temper, which it is the chief design of the gospel to inculcate and produce. That he might more deeply impress their minds with the wickedness and danger of possessing great riches, he made use of this strong figure: It is easier for a camel to go thro' the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. This declaration encreased their amazement. They were astonished out of measure, saying among themselves, who then can be saved. And
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Jesus looking upon them saith, with men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God all things are possible. He assured them, that without divine assistance rich men could not make that resignation of their wealth, which is requisite for becoming a true christian. No believer in the gospel, who has large worldly possessions, I think, can with due attention read this passage of scripture without feeling serious alarm and concern. He can scarcely fail of perceiving, that he must either relinquish all expectation of eternal life and happiness, or distribute a very considerable proportion of his worldly substance amongst the poor. But if he be so wise as to make choice of the latter alternative, what will be the consequence? Will not the great inequality of condition, which his wealth has produced, immediately cease. So that if the end of our saviour in this discourse was to be answered, very little or no difference of outward circumstances would remain amongst men.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus also illustrates in a most striking and convincing manner, how very contrary an inequality of condition is to the leading views of the
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gospel. It was more immediately designed for the use and reproof of the Pharisees. Jesus Christ had been just remarking, that a strong desire of riches, and a real love of God cannot possibly reside in the same breast. He had said to his disciples, no man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one, and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. We are told, that the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard these things, and they derided him. It is therefore reasonable to believe, that our saviour was desirous of convincing them more especially of the great guilt and extreme danger of becoming rich, when he delivered this parable. There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar, named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes being in torments, and seeth Abraham

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ham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said unto him, son, remember, that thou in thy life time receivedst thy good things and likewise Lazarus evil things, but now he is comforted and thou art tormented ; and besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they, who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us, who would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, that thou would send him to my father's house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them : And he said, nay father Abraham, but, if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent : And he said unto him, if they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, tho' one rose from the dead.

The different portions of the two characters here mentioned are determined by a regard to their respective conditions in this world. The rich man is condemned to a place of torment,

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because in his life-time he received his good things ; that is, because he was rich. But Lazarus is conveyed to a place of rest and comfort, because he had endured the hardships of poverty. Does it not then shew a degree of folly approaching nearly to madness to be desirous of becoming rich ; or in other words of possessing a larger share of the good things of life, than the generality of mankind enjoy. Can we after perusing this parable doubt, whether Jesus Christ strongly disapproved inequality of circumstances amongst men ? Perhaps it will be said, that the sufferings of the rich man in hell were incurred by living in luxury, ease, and magnificence, and neglecting the poor. But, for the sake of argument admitting this, is not such a course of life the common and almost necessary consequence of possessing large worldly substance : When we maturely consider the frailty of human nature, and the strong temptations to pride, indolence, and luxury, which great wealth brings along with it, does there appear to be any full security from the commission of those sins, which occasioned the condemnation and final ruin of the rich man ; but descending from high rank and affluent circumstances into the middle station of life ? Does
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not our lord plainly intimate, that the innocence and salvation of mankind depend upon divesting themselves of their wealth and reducing the doctrine of equality of condition into practice?

Moreover the doctrine, which we are examining, will appear to be more fully established, if we peruse with attention the description, which is given by Jesus Christ, of the proceedings of the last day. All prospects of future happiness are represented as depending upon the compassionate attention, which is paid to the wants and distresses of the poor and afflicted, and upon the destruction of that difference of rank and condition, which is too prevalent in the world.

The doctrine, which appears to be inculcated in several discourses of Jesus Christ, which I have been examining, will be found to derive considerable support from an attention to his temper and conduct. If he declined the possession of great power and riches, and was eminently distinguished by the exercise of benevolence and humility, we shall be furnished with additional proof, that a difference of rank and condition is contrary to the

tention and principles of his religion. With this view we will therefore examine the life of Jesus Christ in all its leading circumstances from the time of his birth to the time of his departure out of this world.

Those, who believe in the pre-existence of our lord must acknowledge, that by coming upon earth he displayed a very extraordinary degree of humility and benevolence. But they must be convinced, that by making choice of the rank and condition, in which he appeared, he testified a still more marked dislike and contempt of worldly riches and grandeur. Those also, who regard him as a man endued by God with supernatural power and wisdom, must admit, that if he had approved that inequality, which prevails in the world, he could with ease have risen to a higher state, than that, in which he was born and educated. But no temptations could induce him to change his condition. The devil took him up into an exceedingly high mountain and shewed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said unto him, all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then said Jesus unto him, get thee hence, satan, for it is written, thou

thou shalt worship the lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. His heavenly father with a view of testifying his approbation of his conduct sent angels, who ministered unto him. This strong dislike and contempt of those objects, from the possession of which inequality of rank and condition arises, constantly accompanied our lord throughout the remaining part of his life. Did he on any occasion seek the notice and society of the rich and great? On the contrary, was he not the constant companion of the poor and afflicted? Did he not spend the chief part of his time amongst persons of low condition? With them did he not converse principally, and in the most familiar manner? He has given us a very clear idea of the poverty, and hardship of his situation, when he observes, the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head. Doubtless that almighty Being, who had given him wisdom and power without measure, could have raised him to the most elevated rank, and affluent circumstances, if he had applied for such a demonstration of his regard. But he thought proper to remain in his present condition, and by this means preserved consistency betwixt his instructions and example.

example. The last act of humility, which he performed, was condescending to wash the feet of his disciples, at the same time exhorting them to an imitation of his conduct.

To shew, that I have not mistaken the design of the preaching and example of Jesus Christ, I appeal to the opinion and writings of those, who had an opportunity of seeing and conversing with him, or received an account of his discourses and behaviour from those, who enjoyed such a privilege. All, who were commissioned to preach the doctrines of his gospel, but more especially the apostle Paul, frequently directed their discourse against those dispositions, and practices, by which an inequality of rank and condition is produced. Their writings abound with admonitions against the indulgence of pride, avarice, and a love of pleasure. The professors of the gospel are commanded not to mind high things, but to condescend to men of low estate, to be subject one to another, and to be clothed with humility. They are also exhorted to be pitiful, to bear one another's burdens, and not to seek their own, but each other's good. Moreover they are enjoined, not to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

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Nor was such doctrine inculcated in vain. So much were the first converts to christianity impressed with the belief, that it was their duty to avoid as much as possible all difference of rank and condition, that they came to an unanimous determination to throw all their worldly substance into one common stock for their general benefit and support. The first example of this kind occurred at Jerusalem very soon after the commencement of the ministry of the apostles. About three thousand persons were converted at one time; and all that believed were together, and had all things common, and sold their possessions and their goods and parted them to all men, as every one had need. Their opinion was immediately adopted, and their example followed by other christians. The multitude of them, that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul, neither said any of them that ought of the things, they possessed, was his own, but they had all things common, neither was there any among them that lacked, for as many of them as were possessors of land or houses sold and laid them at the apostles feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. It has been said, that a community of goods is not here commanded;

ed; nor is it forbidden. Nay it is evidently encouraged: for if the apostles had disapproved the practice, they would not have suffered the multitude to lay their effects at their feet, and to make distribution of them amongst the most necessitous. This passage appears to me to give much sanction to the doctrine of equality of condition. But the apostle Paul writes still more decidedly in its favour. When he is urging the Corinthians to the practice of liberality towards their suffering fellow christians, he endeavours in a very particular manner to give them a just notion of this virtue. He says, I mean not, that others be eased and you burdened, but by an equality that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, and their abundance may be a supply for your want, that there may be an equality. If the doctrine, which we are examining, be not clearly recommended in these words, I confess, that I am totally ignorant of their signification.

Another argument in support of the doctrine under examination may be drawn from the reception or opposition, which christianity has met with from persons in different ranks and conditions of life. At the commencement

ment of his ministry Jesus Christ observed, that to the poor the gospel was preached: And it is an undoubted fact, that by them it was chiefly embraced. The common people every where heard him gladly and were converted in great number. The observance of their strong attachment to our saviour made so powerful an impression upon the minds of the chief priests and elders of Israel, that they were afraid openly to insult or apprehend him. He continued teaching daily in the temple; but the chief priests and the scribes, and the rulers of the people sought to destroy him, but could not tell what to do; for all the people were hanging upon him with attention. Nor would his enemies have been able to execute their wicked purpose, if they had not by money tempted one of his disciples to betray him in the absence of the multitude. The apostles likewise were most successful in preaching the gospel among persons of the lowest class. They had favour with all the people. But they were opposed and persecuted by the leading men of the nation. When Peter and John began to repeat those glad tidings, which their master had published, they were first interrupted and imprisoned by the priests, the captain of the temple, and the

Sadducees. This insult was suffered, while they were speaking unto the people. And the following day they were carried before the rulers of the people, the elders, the scribes, the high priest and all his relations, and were commanded not to speak at all, or teach in the name of Jesus. I could produce other examples of the opposition, which was made to the progress of christianity by the rich and great in the first ages after its publication. But the facts, which I have now related, are sufficient to shew, that while the gospel was highly acceptable to the common people, it was generally rejected by persons of high rank and in affluent circumstances. But why did it make so contrary an impression on the minds of men in different conditions? I do not see any way of accounting for this fact in so satisfactory a manner, as by ascribing it to the influence of the doctrine we are examining. The rich and great could not think of resigning their wealth and grandeur for the promises of the gospel, and therefore treated it with neglect, or contempt. One example of this kind is recorded by the evangelist. I have had occasion to take notice of the conduct of a person, who refused to comply with the terms, on which eternal life was offered, because he had
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great possessions. On the contrary the poor observing, how favourable christianity is to their interest joyfully embraced it, wherever its consolatory and blessed truths were preached. If the observation, which I have now made respecting the reception or opposition, which christianity has met with from persons in different ranks and conditions of life, does not afford positive proof, that the doctrine, which we are examining, was inculcated by Jesus Christ, and his apostles, it certainly furnishes very strong presumptive evidence in its favour.

The arguments in support of an equality of rank and condition amongst men, which have now been drawn from the discourses, writings, and conduct of Jesus Christ and his apostles, appear to me entirely conclusive. Perhaps this question might have been decided in a shorter manner. At least, I think it proper, before I proceed, to enlarge upon one observation, which I have made, more distinctly and particularly than I have yet done. In other passages of the new testament besides those, which I have mentioned, a love of riches or money is represented as directly opposite to the design of christianity, and as de-

structive of all hopes of eternal life and happiness. We are assured, that they, who will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.— Now if mankind were induced by such affecting considerations as these to abandon the idea of being rich, would not an equality of condition follow as a necessary consequence? Would not the superfluities of the wealthy supply the wants of the poor, and raise them to a level with those, who are in the middle station of life?

I expect, that attempts will be made to evade the force of the reasoning, which has been employed in support of the doctrine under examination. It may be alledged, that at the publication of the gospel it was necessary, that its professors should sometimes resign their worldly substance for the advancement of their religion, but that in succeeding ages, when christianity became more generally professed and established, such sacrifices were neither required or expedient. I am apprehensive, that this construction is designed to excuse and justify the exercise of pride and selfishness, and a love of ease and sensual enjoyments,

ments, rather than to give the true meaning of scripture on this subject. I do not see, why we should not understand our lord in the first and most obvious sense, which offers, and apply his doctrine to all, who embrace his religion. For if we put a literal interpretation upon his discourses, and the writings of his apostles, upon strict and impartial enquiry we shall find, that it is perfectly agreeable to the principles of reason and benevolence. I hope to prove, that the doctrine of an equality of rank and condition is right both in principle and in practice.

That it is founded on right principle may be easily shewn. It is plain, that a certain portion of worldly substance is necessary for the comfortable support of man, and that in the divine benevolence every one, being alike the creature of his power, has an equal claim to such a share. But do not those, who wish to possess a larger quantity of the outward accommodations of life than the rest of mankind, attempt to destroy this title, and to counteract the purposes of providence. May we not therefore conclude that whoever strives to become rich, and by this conduct to disturb equality of condition amongst men, is charge-

chargeable with injustice towards his fellow creatures, and with an opposition to the views of the divine government.

The doctrine, in support of which I am arguing, is not only right in principle, but highly beneficial, when carried into practice. It will be found to conduce to the moral perfection and happiness of the rich and great as well as of those, who are placed in the lowest situation of life.

We will first examine what influence the doctrine of equality, when carried into practice, is likely to have upon the rich and great.

One remark, which I would make for this purpose, is, that it will conduce to their moral perfection and happiness by securing them from the pernicious effects of many sinful dispositions, enjoyments, and pursuits. We shall be convinced, that a love of great power and wealth is immoral and hurtful, if we reflect, for what purposes they are wanted and pursued. Does not the possession of these objects usually render men proud and overbearing? Every person sees and feels, that great riches give consequence in society, and it is scarcely possible

possible to avoid being unduly elated by the deference and submission, which are paid by those, who are placed in inferior situations. Was it ever known, that any one became more meek and humble in consequence of his elevation from indigent to affluent circumstances? Is it not probable, that the same proud and aspiring disposition, which led him to wish for great wealth, will be still more nourished, when the object of his desire is obtained?

Inequality of condition amongst men, which raises some above others, furnishes also great temptations to dissipation and licentiousness. The gratifications, which riches procure, are adapted only to the lower part of our nature: And an abundance of the good things of life has an evident tendency to encrease our love of sensual indulgences. But it not only excites irregular inclinations; it affords likewise the means of gratifying them. As plenty generally begets excess, so does it likewise enable a man to indulge his depraved appetites in whatever way he pleases. Does not then a desire of affluent circumstances shew a mind not sufficiently attentive to the temptations to luxury, which usually attend the possession of them? Do not the rich and great often discover a fondness for sensual enjoyments, which enfee-
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ble and debase the mind, and spoil its taste for every rational, manly, benevolent, and devotional exercise?

If the doctrine of equality of rank and condition were generally embraced and carried into practice, it would likewise preserve men from that undue selfishness of temper, which is a necessary consequence of labouring to be rich. When a desire of great wealth once takes possession of the mind, it gives it a narrow and contracted turn. The views of men then terminate in themselves, and their hearts grow hardened against the calls of humanity. Could they relieve the necessities of the poor without diminishing their wealth, perhaps they might do it. But as such an act of compassion interferes with the great object of their pursuit, they generally in an unfeeling manner shut the door against every child of want. Thus wrapt up within themselves do they become deaf to all the cries of poverty and distress. Nor, I fear, does the evil end here. When an eager pursuit of riches has steeled the heart against the tender emotions of pity, we must not be surprized, if it leads to the most flagrant acts of dishonesty and oppression. It would be no difficult matter to furnish examples of persons, who to amass large worldly

worldly substance, will even grind the face of the poor.

Another way, in which the doctrine we are considering will tend to improve the moral and religious character of men, is by preventing them from placing too great dependence upon their riches. To those, who are possessed of wealth, it is a strong city, and as a high wall in their own conceit. They find, that with money they can procure every gratification, which this world furnishes. They therefore make gold their hope; they say unto the fine gold, thou art my confidence. They trust in uncertain riches, instead of the living God. They forget that almighty and gracious Being, in whom they live, move, and have their existence. Though it be their duty to acknowledge him in all their ways, they seldom worship him in public, in their families, or in their closets. I fear, that the rich and great feel their minds but little impressed by a sense of religion, and are chiefly distinguished by their pride, sensuality, and avarice. But if the conditions of men were equal, their share of the outward blessings of life would not be so large, as to tempt them to place an undue confidence in what they possessed.

Moreover if the circumstances of all
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men were the same, they would not be in much danger of setting their affections on the riches and honours of this world in such a degree as to forget their everlasting concerns in a future state. They would not be so apt to consider the present state as their proper home. Instead of laying up for themselves treasures upon earth, they would have their conversation in heaven.

If an equality of rank and condition among men were therefore to take place, it appears, that it would preserve them from many sinful dispositions, gratifications, and pursuits, and tend to advance their improvement in virtue and piety. And can we conceive of an object the attainment of which would be of greater importance? Whatever promotes the moral perfection of man, must produce the most valuable advantage, which he can possibly receive. For this is the most sure and effectual means of encreasing his capacity for happiness. By the establishment of good moral habits in his mind he will be prepared for enjoying the highest felicity, which this or another world can furnish. And I hope, that it has been clearly shewn, that the introduction of an equality of rank and condition amongst men would take away every degree of
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temptation to many indulgences and pursuits, which have a certain tendency to corrupt and debase human nature. Can the rich and great therefore, consistently with a proper regard for their own interest, hesitate to adopt a measure, which removes them out of the influence of so much sin and folly, and so greatly advances their moral perfection and happiness?

Another considerable recommendation of this doctrine is, that it will not deprive persons in affluent circumstances of any of the solid comforts and pleasures of life. He, who in consequence of his deeper knowledge of human nature, and happiness spake as man never spake, has observed, that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things, which he possesseth. The real conveniences, and pleasures of the present state lie within a much smaller compass than is generally imagined. The natural wants of men are easily supplied. Plain, wholesome, and substantial food may be procured at small expence. And to provide for the outward accommodation of the body no large sum is required. Convenient houses, and warm clothing are sufficient to protect it from the inclemency of the weather. And whoever possesses the things, which I have now mentioned, enjoys every solid out-

ward comfort in an equal degree with the most wealthy person upon earth. If men suffer their imaginations to carry them further and to fill their minds with a desire of ease, luxury, elegance, and grandeur, their real enjoyments will not be encreased by the gratification of their wishes. In regard to all other satisfactions of life, they belong to all conditions alike. Health of body, peace of mind, public esteem, private friendship, moral worth, religious principles, divine favour, and the hope of future happiness are blessings, which may be enjoyed by persons in the lowest, as well as in the most affluent circumstances.

From the observations, which have now been made, it appears, that the great and rich would be no sufferers, if an equality of rank and condition were to take place. On the contrary it has been shewn, that such a change would contribute in no small degree to their moral perfection and happiness.

We will now consider what effect the doctrine under examination will produce upon those, who are placed in low and indigent circumstances. And can any truth be more manifest, than that it would greatly conduce to their advantage? How much would their
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state be improved, if for their benefit the rich and great would retrench all useless expence? At present what prodigious sums are squandered away on magnificent houses, ostentatious equipages, attendance of numerous servants, gay diversions, and luxurious entertainments! If this wealth was employed in feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, healing the sick, and providing for the various exigencies of the poor, what a blessed change would be produced in their condition!

If the doctrine of equality were carried into practice, a few happy consequences would be experienced by the poor, which I think, are deserving of more particular notice.

One advantage, which they would derive from such a change in their circumstances, is, that they would be delivered from an abject state of dependence upon those above them for their daily bread. At present they are taught to believe, they receive a favour, when employment is given to them, and are reproached with ingratitude, if they are not thankful, when an opportunity is furnished of procuring the necessaries of life. But if the rich and great would put themselves into a state of equality with the poor, no one would continue any longer in this servile condition.

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Another happy consequence flowing from the adoption of such a measure, and nearly connected with the effect already mentioned is, that they would be relieved from that excessive labour which they are obliged to perform in order to procure a subsistence. It is not possible to ascertain the number of hands, which are employed in administering to the pride and luxury of the great and rich. But there is no doubt, that it is very considerable. Now if these hands were engaged in useful industry, what great relief would be given to the labouring part of mankind. All the conveniences of life would then be furnished by moderate work during eight or ten hours every day. Admitting this to be fact, we cannot fail of seeing, that the condition of the poor would by this means be very much improved. For I fear that at present many of them are obliged to follow hard labour twelve or fourteen hours every day in order to obtain a tolerable maintenance for their families.

Another very important benefit, which would be derived from an equalization of rank and condition amongst men, is, that by this means the poor would be rescued from their present state of extreme ignorance and depravity. It is a lamentable fact, that in many places

places their children are sent to work twelve hours every day, as soon as they have acquired the use of their hands. While this is the case, how and when can they gain knowledge? Can we reasonably wonder, that they should be so extremely ignorant and wicked? And what remedy for this evil shall we find, which will be so effectual, as that, which I have mentioned? If persons of high rank and in affluent circumstances would resign their grandeur, luxury, and amusements, and if the occupations of labour were equally divided amongst mankind, the whole period of childhood might be employed in receiving instruction. And it is easy to see, that by gaining knowledge at this early season they would be not only more fully prepared for many useful employments, but their moral characters would be greatly exalted and improved. For there is no just reason to doubt, that many vices of the poor arise from ignorance. They are often unacquainted with their duty and interest, and if they had more leisure for gaining knowledge, they would be furnished with several motives to right conduct, by which their minds are not at present influenced.

The arguments, which have now been
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urged in support of the doctrine of equality of rank and condition amongst men, are designed to shew its beneficial influence on the state of the rich and poor. But to illustrate its importance still more clearly, it will be proper to mention another consideration in its favour, which is of a more extensive nature. It is worthy of remark, that if it was carried into practice, it would put an entire end to the envy and contention, by which in every age the peace, good order, and happiness of the world have been disturbed. Is not pride the most common and fruitful source of confusion and misery amongst men? Has not a strife, who shall be the greatest, occasioned numberless quarrels and calamities in private life? Has not ambition been likewise the chief origin of those cruel and ruinous wars, which have been frequently carried on between different nations? If we closely investigate the cause of all contentions both civil and religious, we shall find, that they have been chiefly, if not entirely owing to an excessive love of power or riches. But if an equalization of rank and condition were to take place, ambition and avarice would immediately cease to exist. For as I have had repeated occasion to observe, no equality can be maintained,

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while either of these dispositions are suffered to operate.

The force of the remarks, which have been now made in commendation of the doctrine, which we are examining, would be much encreased, if I could produce an example of it's having been completely reduced to practice in modern times. I am not acquainted with any body of men, who have made an approach towards the establishment of an equality amongst themselves, excepting the sect of christians denominated Quakers. They allow no titles or difference of rank, nor are there any persons in very low circumstances belonging to them. The only respect, in which they seem to fail in their compliance with the doctrine which we are considering, is, that some individuals amongst them have been overcome by a desire of possessing great wealth. But I wish from their example particularly to observe in support of the opinion, which I am maintaining, that we do not find in this sect the distress, ignorance, and profligacy, which appear in the lowest class of men amongst the generality of christians. Do we ever see in our jails or our workhouses any persons of their denomination? But if such happy ef-

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fects arise from an imperfect observance of the doctrine of equality, we have reason to expect that more important benefits to society would result from a complete reduction of it into practice.

I have now endeavoured to prove, that equality of rank and condition is a doctrine not only founded upon the authority of the new testament, but likewise supported by the principles of reason and benevolence.

I am aware, that this doctrine is contrary to the common and received opinion of mankind, and that therefore many objections will be raised against it. Those, which appear to be most deserving of notice, I propose to examine, and hope to give a satisfactory answer to them.

1. It will be alledged, that a difference of rank and condition has existed in every period of the world, and that therefore all ages have born ample testimony to its utility.—Certainly antient and general opinion ought not to be treated with contempt. Yet our deference to it may be carried to excess. Despotic forms of civil government are the most antient and universal. But no person, who
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has enjoyed the blessings of liberty, would choose to live in a country, where such an administration of public affairs is established. A distinction of rank and condition cannot be proper, merely because it has prevailed in all ages and countries. It ought to be admitted or rejected in proportion to its tendency to advance or diminish the happiness of mankind. If the observations, which have been made with a view of shewing the beneficial influence of an equality of circumstances amongst men, be therefore well founded, the objection under consideration falls to the ground, and the arguments brought in its support remain possessed of all their force.

2. Perhaps it will be said, that admitting the utility of the doctrine under examination, it is visionary, enthusiastic, and impracticable. It must be granted that pride, sensuality, and covetousness are very common motives to action, and that mankind feel an almost insurmountable difficulty in raising others to a level with themselves. But a reluctance to undertake what is right cannot be considered as a satisfactory excuse for the neglect of duty. If it could be admitted, all obligation to the practice of virtue would immediately cease.

There is, for example, so much profligacy and drunkenness amongst men, that all attempts to render them chaste and sober seem as fruitless, as to restrain ambition, luxury, and avarice. The only consideration deserving of serious regard is, whether in consequence of establishing an equality of rank and condition mankind would be rendered more generally happy. Now I hope it has been clearly demonstrated, that such a change would be productive of public good, and it is therefore the duty of every one to concur in promoting it.

Jesus Christ was fully sensible of the great reluctance, which persons in high station and affluent circumstances would feel to comply with the terms of salvation, which he has offered. He says, how hardly shall they, that have riches enter into the kingdom of God. But he has endeavoured to convince them, that it is their interest to sacrifice their ease, plenty, and magnificence to the profession of the gospel. He assured his disciples, that every one, that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for his name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit eternal life. He has also given the rich ground
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to expect, that if they cheerfully attempt to resign the superfluities of life, God will assist them in carrying their good purposes into execution. I am persuaded, that if they would in good earnest engage in the undertaking, they would not find it so difficult, as they imagine, to bring themselves down to a level with the rest of the world. With divine help they might contract their expences, and transfer the possession of some part of their worldly substance every year, till at length they were reduced to that state of equality, in which they were desirous of living.

It will be alledged, that tho' the rich and great should contribute their part towards producing an equality of rank and condition, their exertions would be defeated by those, who at present are in low circumstances. It will be said, that tho' the poor were raised to a higher and more comfortable situation, they would by their idleness and extravagance be soon reduced to their former state. This objection is evidently ill founded, because it implies, that a violation of duty in one person justifies the neglect of it in another. If some of the poor abuse the advantages, which are put into their hands, their perverse conduct does not release the rich and prosperous from
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an obligation to advance the welfare and comfort of those who are disposed to improve the blessings, which they possess. Nor are they in consequence of it less bound to practise a doctrine, which has a tendency to promote their own moral perfection, and capacity for happiness. Besides, the charge, which we are examining, does not lie more against the poor than against persons in affluent circumstances. Idleness and extravagance are vices which are seen in all conditions of life. But the consideration, which is most deserving of attention, is, that if the poor were raised to a higher and more comfortable state, they would be rescued from that extreme ignorance, which is the principal source of their depravity. Indeed the lowest class of men in society according to the present circumstances of the world would no longer exist. If the elevation, of which I am speaking, was therefore to take place, there would be no greater abuse of the comforts and blessings of life, than now appears amongst persons in the middle station of life.

Probably it will be still further urged, that though an equality of rank and condition be right, and the higher and lower orders of men in society should unite their efforts to
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reduce such a doctrine into practice, yet if they are not instructed in what manner they shall accomplish their purpose, they can derive no benefit from a conviction of its importance. When the various habits and expences of living in different countries are taken into consideration, it seems very difficult to determine with precision what property or income upon an equalization of condition each individual or family would possess. What quantity of worldly substance every rich man desirous of complying with the doctrine under examination should reserve for his own use, it must be left to his own judgment and conscience to decide. Nor do I think, if he be sincere and in earnest, that he will meet with so much difficulty in doing this, as we are apt to imagine. He will easily see, that in making his calculation not only the general circumstances of mankind, but likewise his own situation as a single individual, or as the head of a small or large family are to be taken into the account. But it appears scarcely reasonable to lay much stress upon the objection here urged, when it is considered, that the same difficulty occurs in attempting to give an exact definition of several important virtues. For instance, it is not in the power of the most
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accurate moralist to say what precise quantity of food the virtue of temperance requires, that every individual should eat. It is plain, that some persons stand in need of a larger portion than others. But shall we on this account assert, that our notions of temperance are visionary, or if it does exist, that it is impracticable. Moreover, tho' we cannot precisely define what portion of food every man ought to take for the support of life, yet there is evidently a certain quantity, which is useless and excessive. In like manner a person may desire a certain measure of worldly substance, which at the very first sight must appear to be inconsistent with the doctrine of equality. The main object, to which the rich and great should attend, is therefore to guard against the possession of so much property, as would exceed that, which would fall to their share, if an exact division of the outward blessings of life was made throughout the world, or in the country, in which they reside. . After all, I am apprehensive, that the difficulty, which I am endeavouring to remove, does not arise so much from a want of knowledge, as from a want of inclination. Let persons in affluent circumstances be only sincerely desirous of bringing themselves to a level with the rest of
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mankind, and they can never commit so great an error in judgment, as to occasion a material departure from the doctrine under examination. At least that strong bias, which every man feels for his own interest, will prevent them from making any sacrifices, which will be injurious to their own comfort and happiness.

3. Let it not be asserted, that the wise creator has appointed so great difference of station and circumstances in human life, that the beauty and excellence of the moral character might be displayed more conspicuously, and in several different lights.* I trust, I have shewn, that an equality of rank and condition will produce this effect in a very eminent degree, and therefore this remark must be erroneous and groundless. I have gone one step further, I have proved, that a difference of station and circumstances has a very pernicious influence on the moral character and happiness of mankind. I have made it appear, that wealth and power furnish temptations to pride, sensuality, avarice, a forgetfulness of God, and a neglect of the everlasting concerns of the soul in a future state, and that

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* Foster's Sermons, vol. ii, page 186.

poverty sinks a large proportion of mankind to a servile dependance upon their fellow creatures, subjects them to hard labour and distress, and keeps them in a condition of great ignorance and depravity. Surely it will not be maintained, that there is any beauty in a constitution of human affairs, which is productive of all these consequences.

4. In opposition to the doctrine, which we are examining, it is said, that a difference of rank and condition is best adapted to a state of discipline; that the various tempers of men require, that they should be placed in different situations.* The force of this objection evidently depends upon the supposition, that the present circumstances of mankind are always suited to their dispositions. But is this really the case? For example, are the extravagant, imperious, and dissolute always in a state of poverty and distress, which seems best calculated for subduing and correcting their tempers? Does it not as frequently happen, that they live in plenty, ease, and magnificence? And is not such a course of life sure to encrease the wrong tendency of their inclinations? Besides, the argument in favour of
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* Foster's Sermon, vol. ii, page 188.

inequality of rank and condition, which we are examining, is founded upon a mistaken idea of this world as a state of trial and discipline. To advance the moral perfection of mankind, it does not seem necessary to encrease, but on the contrary to diminish the sinful allurements and sufferings of life. In the present unequal circumstances of the world, they are both often found too powerful for human virtue. But if there was neither want or superfluity, the trials of men would be considerably lessened, and their good dispositions would be more likely to acquire strength and stability.

5. With a view of maintaining the doctrine of subordination it is argued, that we see different orders of being amongst the works of God in this world, and in the sacred scriptures are taught to believe, that in a future state, there will be a diversity of rank amongst men. In particular we are told, that as one star differeth from another in glory, so also shall be the resurrection of the dead, and that the apostles shall sit on thrones as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. Doubtless there are different orders of being both in the animal and vegetable world, but then we do not

observe different ranks in the same species. Analogy does not therefore require, that there should be a subordination amongst the human race. In respect to the distinction which will appear at the general resurrection, it seems to relate to moral and intellectual attainments, and not to advantages of outward condition. Perhaps it will be thought, that this assertion is contradicted by the promise, made to the apostles. It is not easy to determine what is meant by sitting on thrones, as judges of the twelve tribes of Israel. It could scarcely be designed to raise in them the expectation of extraordinary power. For their master had been just guarding them against a love of dominion, and would not therefore encourage the indulgence of a passion, of which he had so lately expressed his disapprobation:

6. It is pleaded, that a difference of rank and condition in human life is plainly calculated to promote the general happiness. It is imagined, that the comfort of our present being would be prodigiously diminished, if there was not a provision made of a sufficient number of persons to be employed in laborious and servile offices, that contemplative men may have leisure for illustrations of religion and morality,

morality, and improvement in useful arts and sciences.* I flatter myself that the objection here brought against the doctrine under examination will not be at all regarded, when it is recollected, that I have shewn, that on the contrary an equality of station and circumstances is highly conducive to the moral perfection and happiness of mankind. I would now add, that the doctrine, which I am endeavouring to support, if reduced into practice, would be no impediment to the promotion of literature and useful science. Have not the most important discoveries been made by persons in the middle station of life?—Great wealth and power are not therefore requisite for the advancement of useful arts and knowledge. And unhappy would it be for the human race, and dishonorable to the divine government, if a larger part of mankind were obliged to live in a state of servility and hard labour for the purpose of producing the comfort and ease of the rest of the world.

7. It is alledged, that the labour of the poor is not greater than good management would enable them with ease to perform; and that the benefit arising from it to society by lessening

* Foster's Sermons, vol. ii, page 190.

lessening it would be entirely lost. It is said, that they frequently spend two or three days in the week in idleness and drunkenness, and that in seasons of scarcity, when provisions are dear, they can maintain their family without much difficulty. That the labour of the poor is excessive I have had occasion already to remark, and will here add a few observations with a view of shewing, that the allegation here urged is founded on a mistaken notion of their situation. If in some places, but more especially in manufacturing countries the poor waste some days every week in idleness and irregularity, let us examine, to what cause this evil is owing? When they have mispent some portion of their time in this manner, are they not obliged to have recourse to almost incessant labour to redeem that, which has been lost? Are they not under a necessity of beginning their work early in the morning and of continuing it to a late hour at night? And is not the consequence of this course of living exactly such, as might be reasonably expected? By long confinement and incessant labour their strength and spirits are entirely exhausted, and relaxation becomes indispensibly necessary. They feel such an abhorrence of all work, that they cannot immediately return

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to it; and in consequence of their great ignorance, having no resort for rational amusement they betake themselves to drinking, and other irregularities of conduct. Now all this weariness and disgust with labour might be avoided, if the rich would admit the poor to an equal share of the good things of life with themselves. A close application to work would then become less necessary, the irksomeness occasioned by excessive labour would never be experienced, and they would have leisure for acquiring that knowledge, which is requisite for improving their morals, and refining their amusements.—To say, that the poor do not suffer any great hardships, because in times of great scarcity and distress they can perform more work, than they do in general, affords no proof, that their present situation is not uncomfortable. Let any man impartially reflect upon the quantity of labour, to which persons in low circumstances are obliged to submit, and he must consider it as excessive, unless he believes, that God created one part of mankind to administer in a servile manner to the pride, ease, and luxury of the rest of the world.

8. Further, it has been pleaded in favour
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of inequality of rank and condition, that by retaining the possession of great riches mankind will be enabled to practice a very enlarged benevolence, and to oppose and defeat the purposes of the proud tyrant and oppressor. Doubtless such an application of great wealth is laudable and divine. But it is not so useful as the conduct, which I am recommending. A larger quantity of happiness would be produced by dividing our property into equal shares with the necessitous, than by distributing our income arising from the possession of it in the same proportion amongst them. By this means several families would be raised to a state of comfort and independence. It is highly probable also, that by the skill and industry of many worldly substance would be more improved than if it remained in the hands of an individual.——Perhaps it may be further alledged, that some undertakings cannot be carried on without a large capital, or at least that they may be conducted with greater advantage on an enlarged than a confined scale. But admitting the fact (which appears questionable) might not several persons have shares in a large undertaking, and divide the profits equally amongst them? I fear, that those, who urge the plea, which I
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am examining, are more desirous of their own aggrandizement, than promoting the public good.

9. Another objection to the doctrine, which I have been advancing is, that it suppresses that strong desire of riches and honour, which is a powerful incentive to ingenuity and industry. It cannot be denied, that such a wish has excited some individuals to make improvements in useful arts and sciences. But are there not other motives, which will produce the same effect? May not a man be as active and industrious, when the advancement of general happiness is the leading object of his pursuit, as when he is labouring for his own private honour and emolument? And should the exertion of his talents be crowned with success, may he not derive as much happiness from distributing amongst his fellow men the fruits of his labour and ingenuity as from squandering them away in luxury and magnificence?

10. Another reason, it is said, why an equality of rank and condition should not take place, is, that it would prevent the exercise of several amiable and excellent dispositions;

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that if for instance, there were not some rich and some poor, there would be but little scope for the exercise of charity and gratitude. But it may be replied, that tho' the general state of mankind would be much improved by being brought nearly to an equality, yet every cause of distress would not be removed by this means. Imprudence or misfortune would be continually furnishing opportunities to the successful for the practice of benevolence, and to the afflicted for the indulgence of a grateful disposition. Happy would it be indeed, if the compliance with the doctrine under consideration would entirely take away all misery from the world; this effect would amply compensate for every inconvenience arising from the practice of it. But there is no reasonable ground to expect, that this will ever be the case.

II. Further, in opposition to the doctrine, which we have been examining it has been observed, that in the new testament the distinction of rich and poor is established and allowed every where amongst believers.* If this be a fact, I confess my ignorance of it. I think, that I have abundantly shewn, that
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* Secker's Sermons, vol. iii, page 224.

Jesus Christ in his discourses has clearly pointed out the great guilt and danger of possessing riches, and that his apostles have inculcated the same doctrine. In the epistles of the latter the rich are mentioned, but with no other view than to admonish them of their faults, and instruct them in their duty. Slanderers and drunkards are also addressed for the same purposes. But can it be inferred from hence, that the existence of either of these characters is approved? The same apostle who charges the rich not to be high minded or trust in uncertain riches, but to do good and be ready to communicate, tells us, that having food and raiment we should therewith be content. He also adds, that they, who will be rich, fall into temptations and a snare, and into foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. The apostle Paul here points out very strongly the sinfulness of riches, and earnestly exhorts Timothy to flee these things.

12. The last objection to the doctrine, which I have been examining, of which I

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shall now take notice, is, that no attempt to destroy a difference of condition amongst men can be made without the most dreadful injustice, confusions, and mischiefs in human society.* It will appear, that there is no just ground to expect any of these effects, if the question under consideration be clearly and properly understood. Supposing an equality of rank and condition was to take place in consequence of a voluntary surrender by the rich of all honorary distinctions and superfluities, might not the several professions and employments of men be pursued with the same regularity and success as they are at present. Neither the professions of medicine, law, and divinity, or the business of the farmer, manufacturer, and merchant would be disturbed. The various offices of civil government might also be still discharged without interruption or delay. Nor would the doctrine of equality, as I have now stated it, excite the lower orders of men to violence and insurrection. The change of circumstances, which the practice of it would occasion, must come from the rich and great themselves. An equalization of property, if produced by any other means, is neither consistent with the precepts of christi-

* Secker's Sermons, vol. iii, page 224.

christianity, or the principles of reason and benevolence. If persons in a low and indigent condition were to attempt such a revolution, it would become the duty of the civil magistrate to oppose and defeat their designs.

From the view, which has now been taken of the objections against an equality of rank and condition amongst men, it appears, that they chiefly arise from a misapprehension of the doctrine. I hope, that the answers, which have now been given, will be generally thought to be satisfactory; and that the truth, which I have been endeavouring to establish, is fully demonstrated. But if an equality of rank and condition be founded upon the authority of the new testament, and dictated by the principles of reason and benevolence, does it not become the duty of the rich and great to bring themselves down as nearly as possible to a level with the rest of mankind? For the accomplishment of so laudable a purpose, let them therefore attentively consider, what share of worldly property, or what income they ought to possess, and then act accordingly. By pursuing such conduct they will become entitled to higher respect, than could be derived from the most splendid rank, and plentiful circumstances.

stances. They will also nobly imitate the distinguished benevolence and humility of our lord Jesus Christ, who, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich. By divesting themselves of their wealth and grandeur, they will likewise secure the favour and approbation of their judge at the great day of retribution. He will say unto them: Inasmuch as ye have made these sacrifices for the relief and comfort of my poor afflicted brethren, ye have done them unto me,

THE END.

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